

Sound Transit/WSDOT Re-Alignment Issue Paper No. 31

TOPIC:	Added Access Report For FHWA As It Relates To The Environmental Review Process
ACTION TEAM SPONSOR:	Environmental Action Team
PRIMARY AUTHOR(S):	FHWA, Sharon P. Love, Environmental Program Manager
APPLICABLE PROJECTS:	All ST Projects requiring new access points or changes to access points on Interstate or State Routes
ISSUE:	What is required for FHWA's Added Access Report as it relates to the environment and review process?
DATE APPROVED:	January 26, 2001

BACKGROUND:

The WSDOT Design Manual (Chapter 1425) and FHWA regulations (23USC Section11) require preparation of a detailed access point decision report using the guidance in 1425.05 of the manual. The following background is excerpted from Chapter 1425 of the WSDOT Design Manual:

The Access Point Decision Report usually addresses eight specific policy topics in detail. They are, in order of presentation:

1. Future Interchanges
2. Land Use and Transportation Plans
3. Reasonable Alternatives
4. Need for the Access Point Revision
5. Access Connections and Design
6. Operational and Accident Analyses
7. Coordination
8. Planning and Environmental Processes

The extent of the decision report varies considerably with the scope of the access point revision. For example, for locked gates and emergency temporary access to sites normally accessed by another route, the application for approval may be condensed to a letter format that includes adequate justification. The Access Point Decision Report is begun early in the environmental process because it's analyses help define the area of impact and the range of alternatives. Since the traffic data required for NEPA or SEPA



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and the operational analyses of the decision report are similar, these documents are usually developed together using the same data sources and procedures.

When the access point revision is on an Interstate freeway, regardless of funding sources, the State Design Engineer submits the decision report to FHWA with a request for acceptance and approval. Acceptance of the proposed access point revision by FHWA or the State Design Engineer is a *finding of engineering and operational acceptability*. For state routes, the State Design Engineer's acceptance is given concurrently with environmental approval. Some Interstate access point revisions are reviewed by FHWA at the local divisional level in Washington State and consequently require less time for a determination of acceptability and final approval. Others are reviewed by the Federal Highway Administrator in Washington, DC, and can require a more protracted review and acceptance process. See Figure 1425-1b for details.

FHWA final approval requires that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures are followed. The NEPA procedures are accomplished as part of the normal project development process and as a condition of the access approval. Final access point approval cannot precede the completion of the NEPA process. To offer maximum flexibility, however, any proposed access point(s) may be submitted for a determination of engineering and operational acceptability prior to completion of the NEPA process. A determination can be made as to whether or not a proposal is acceptable for inclusion as an option in the environmental process.

For Interstate projects FHWA makes the final approval of the access point revision concurrently with the local division level environmental approval (as in the case of a Record of Decision) or as part of the NEPA approval.

DECISIONS:

The Added Access Decision Report process should be done concurrently with the NEPA documentation. Much of the data required is the same for both processes, and either process may result in changes to the other (additional lanes or changes to the configuration may be required by the Added Access Decision Report, and environmental constraints may require changes to the design of the new access point). A final, approved access report is not required to issue a FONSI (see issue paper #22). The WSDOT Design Office and the FHWA Transportation and Environmental Engineer should be involved to determine if any review by FHWA HQ will be required.

The EAT recommends that the Executive Sponsorship Team explore the opportunity for concurrent reviews of the Added Access Decision Report by WSDOT Olympia Service Center and WSDOT regions to streamline the environmental process.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION TEAM DECISION ON ISSUE PAPER NO. 31:
Added Access Report**

AGREED TO ON JANUARY 26, 2001 BY:



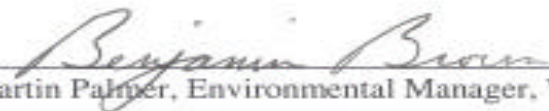
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